

Castlemaine Naturalist June '97

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Grey Falcon at Cullens Lake

Whilst driving along the western edge of Cullens Lake near Kerang in Northern Victoria I noticed a raptor take a small dark bird from just above the water, much to the consternation of the Silver Gulls and Masked Lapwings around it. When the bird settled on the shore to enjoy its catch I realized that this raptor was different. It was grey on the back, the grey being a similar hue to that of a Grey Shrike-thrush or a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. The bird flew a short distance with the catch in its talons and settled again, revealing that the outer parts of the wings were a darker grey-black. I then noted that the bird's head had a darker grey "cap", and that the bill was largely orange-yellow, and that the legs were yellow. The underbelly was almost pure white, and the head of the bird was unmistakably that of a falcon; it was a Grey Falcon!

The bird was about 40 metres away, eating its prey on the shore of the lake, and remained long enough for me to pinch myself and believe what I was seeing. When I left the vehicle to try and identify the prey, the bird took off with it, so the unfortunate victim's identity remains a mystery. I continued north to take some groundwater bore measurements by the lake, and returned along the western side of the lake, again seeing the falcon, this time in the air. This gave me an opportunity to take some further notes on the bird. There are many raptors in the area (Whistling Kites, Fork-tailed Kites, Brown Falcons, Kestrels and Little Eagles are all common) and this allowed me to make some comparisons.

This bird is larger than a Kestrel or a Black-shouldered Kite, but distinctly smaller than a Brown Falcon (two of which were in the air at the same time that I took the notes). It flew with its wings held dead flat (not even slightly upswept or downswept) and flew with fairly fast wingbeats interspersed with short glides. The Grey Falcon appeared to be more nimble and robust in the air than the Brown Falcon, but still perhaps less so than the two dashers among the Australian falcons, the Hobby and the Peregrine Falcon. In flight the light tone of grey on the

back made it immediately recognisable from the other raptors I often see in this area, (apart from the Black-shouldered Kite which has a distinctive shape, and of course, black shoulders).

I hope these notes will help anyone identify this rare little jewel of a raptor.

Simon Kennedy

Box-Ironbark Workshop

(The Cut-it-down-or-dig-it-up Mentality!)

The campaign to preserve and protect the Box-Ironbark open forests of northern Victoria from this sort of attitude is under way, but the forces of inertia are ever present despite it being the least reserved and most threatened wooded ecosystem in Australia; barely 15% of it remains after 150 years of white settlement. At least $\frac{1}{4}$ of woodland birds are in decline and a very high number of plants and animals are threatened by a continuing loss of habitat.

This may be our last chance to reverse the decline by safeguarding what is left in parks, and creating a properly constituted and comprehensive conservation reserve status; allowing the trees and understory to regenerate by excluding mining (with its toxic tailing dams), quarrying and timber extraction activities and minimising the intrusion of livestock, noxious pests and weeds. This must involve the whole community - nature conservation equates with land conservation. We can encourage rural communities to conserve their remnant bushland and support landcare groups where the farmers are saving old trees and replanting trees that are native to the area in the knowledge that arresting land degradation improves the quality of the land. Moreover, it is more cost effective to protect and preserve existing remnant vegetation than it is to replant.

Sadly, native vegetation on private land is very vulnerable and is being lost at an unacceptable rate due to non-enforced and weak clearance controls. The Victorian Government is culpable and a complete lack of commitment to the public process may be the problem.

All this and more came through at the Box-Ironbark Bush Alliance workshop which I attended on behalf of the Castlemaine FNC, the purpose of which was to meet and work with other groups participating in the campaign.

Perhaps we have put too much faith in the Land Conservation Council investigation into the future use of public land within the Box-Ironbark country. We now learn that this professional and publicly

funded independant arbiter of land use has been abolished and replaced by a body orientatied to "develop land" at the direction of the Minister without community input, just when we were hoping to receive the descriptive report of their Box-Ironbark study. This may be shelved and the other recommendation stages never appear.

Perhaps the best remedy we have is People Power - talking to our friends and associates, writing to the local media and State M.P.s, asking local Government to take an active role along the lines of the Shire Action Plan. One thing we are not short of is people who care about retaining and enriching our Box-Ironbark landscape. An argument in our favour is that only 3% of the original extent of Box-Ironbark is securely reserved, whereas the Federal/States Regional Forest Agreement calls for 15% of a forest type to be set aside for protection, and this is one of the things that should be pointed out when we write.

Chris Morris

Babblings from Barkers Creek, #4

Kangaroos and Wallabies

In April I mentioned to you that as a result of a very dry season (and my excellent looking lawn!!) we are visited each night by a varying group of Grey Kangaroos, including a very young one who always arrives early and eats up all the pellets before his big brothers and sisters arrive.

Then throughout the night the rest of the family arrive to partake in the feast. Lately they have been eating closer and closer to the windows of our bedroom. One night late in April we had some broken sleep due to Jacqui suffering badly from a very sore back. At one stage I took the opportunity, while we were both awake, to get up for a reason which I am sure you will all recognise. I swung my legs over the edge of the bed, and there within a few feet of me was a Grey Kangaroo standing very still and watching me intently. So, I sat on the edge of the bed and watched him.

It was a full moonlit night, so we could clearly see each other. I sat, so as not to disturb him. It was also a cold, frosty night. I sat and watched him ... while he sat and watched me. And I sat, and I sat, becoming colder, and colder, until the cold, or the cause of me originally getting up, won, so I stood up and my mate departed in haste.

As we are not on town water our garden has been designed, by Jacqui, around a mass of pots. But, due to the season, our in-house wallaby, Wally, has become more than interested in Jacqui's lovely display of flowers. She has countered by spraying the plants with "Deter" which Wally has gradually developed a taste for, despite its

bitter flavour. Not to be outsmarted Jacqui purchased a roll of nylon bird netting which she draped over the large pots and over groups of smaller pots. This beat Wally - but only for a few nights. He then proceeded to lift the edges of the netting to feed. So Jacqui weighted the netting down and in other places staked it. But not to be outdone Wally again countered by pressing down the netting until the flowers pop through and he can have a meal.

Our latest solution is to take off for France for a holiday and leave things to Wally.

Would anyone like a pet wallaby????

So the Barker's Creek Babblings will be missing for a few months, but I will see if I can spot a few things of interest in the French countryside.

John Turnbull

Djadja Wurrung

A new and comprehensive book documenting the Aboriginal people of Central Victoria and their language is now available from the author and publisher, John Tully of Dunolly.

The book includes a brief history of the Djadja Wurrung people, maps of the area, background of the language, a list of Djadja Wurrung words including the counting system, stars, constellations and their meanings, flora and fauna, extinct or endangered animals and some personal names. There are also some Central Victorian place names and meanings and a 595 x 500mm fold out map of place names. The book is on A4 paper, stitched and glued.

The Club has an order form if you are interested in buying the book, which is \$19-50, and/or the laminated version of the place names map (595x500mm), which is \$20-00. Postage and handling is \$2-50.

If you want to make a direct order send your cheque or money order to John Tully, Box 50, Dunolly, 3472.

Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters

The heading sounds hopeful, and so were we when we set out on Saturday May 10. We'd divided up into about 4 groups, most trying the tracks in Muckleford forest, but one group tried some tracks in Smiths Reef as well, and Margaret Badminton and I headed out to Pound Lane in Newstead, and Mia Mia Road, then taking Golf Links Track to the right and then the track to the Red, White and Blue mine where we all met up

for afternoon tea, and to report on the birds seen - none of which were Swift Parrots or Regent Honeyeaters!

The wind was from the east and the sky clear when we started our count at 2 pm. The area has a predominance of Yellow Gum, but there is some Grey and Yellow Box, with an understory of Kangaroo Thorn, (mainly along the road). The paddocks have some larger old trees and quite a number of saplings. There were no trees in flower on any part of the survey.

We seemed to have taken the best area for birds, seeing most in Pound Lane. There were lots of White-plumed Honeyeaters, Magpies, Dusky Woodswallows, including four which were cuddling together on a branch - until they decided to chase each other instead-, Willie Wagtails, Wrens, Red-rumped Parrots, Diamond Firetails, Brown Treecreeper, Kookaburra, Spotted Pardalote, Red Wattlebirds, Grey Shrike-thrush, Galahs, and Mudlarks chasing a Brown Falcon.

Mia Mia Road had a predominance of Grey Box with some Red Gum and paddocks with some trees either side of the road, before entering in the forest. Very little was seen on the open part of the road beside Magpies and a Kookaburra or two and four Jacky Winters together on a fence. There were also some Eastern Rosellas and Willie Wagtails.

At 3 o'clock we were on Golf Links Road which had mainly Iron Barks and Grey Box. Along there we saw Wrens, White-throated Treecreepers and Eastern Rosellas. The Red White and Blue track (once known as the Blow Mine track) was mainly Red Box and Iron Barks with Golden Wattle understory. Again we saw few birds, but on the way out after afternoon tea we spotted the Brown Quail which had been seen by another group earlier.

It was a little disappointing not being able to find any of the birds we were particularly looking for, but never-the-less it was a lovely afternoon. We all should keep a lookout for the Swift Parrots and Regent Honeyeaters whenever we go out, and if we do see them note date, conditions, vegetation, wind and time of day and pass on the report to the Club or directly to Natasha Schedvin (the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator) or Chris Tzaros (the Swift Parrot Project Officer),

Department of Natural Resources and Environment,

PO Box 500

East Melbourne. 3002

G.D.T. June Walk -

Sunday 29 at Franklin Gorge. Duration 4-6 hours. Meet at Sawpit Gully turnoff, at 9.30am. Leader is Ed Butler, Ph 0353 482367 (BH)

Sandon Birds, April '97

This is the last bird list from the Sandon property as Susanna has shifted into Castlemaine. This list was made amidst the throes of packing and shifting!

Pacific Black Duck	White-eared,
Little Eagle	Yellow-tufted,
Masked Lapwing	Fuscous,
Common Bronzewing	White-plumed,
Galah	Brown-headed and
Crimson Rosella	White-naped Honeyeaters
Australian Owlet-nightjar	Scarlet Robin
Laughing Kookaburra	Rufous Whistler
White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Shrike-thrush
Wren	Grey Fantail
Spotted Pardalote	Willie Wagtail
Striated Pardalote	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Speckled Warbler	Australian Magpie
Weebill	Grey Currawong
Brown,	Australian Raven
Buff-rumped,	White-winged Chough
Yellow-rumped and	Red-browed Finch
Striated Thornbills	Welcome Swallow
Red Wattlebird	Silvereye
Yellow-faced,	

Susanna Starr

Observations

* From the Castlemaine Rifle Club - a family of Tuans has been living behind the targets at the Rifle Range. They've been there for several years, and the nest is lined with feathers. Sadly one was found dead recently, and a feral cat was thought to be the culprit.

* Kurt Simmons who lives in Vanston Road was woken by an awful noise on the steep iron roof one morning. It proved to be some Galahs sliding down the roof, flying to the ridge and sliding down again. I've told this story to a couple of people, who had also known of this happening or have had experience of it themselves.

* Tasmanian Silvereyes were seen at North Castlemaine on 20/5. A few days earlier there was a small flock of Sitellas as well as White-naped and Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes and Striated and Little Thornbills in the same trees. Seen since, for the first time for the house block - Choughs and a New Holland Honeyeater. Rita Mills.

* Maureen and Ken Dredge were intrigued to see Gang Gang Cockatoos in the centre of Traralgon. Drummond and Sandon are the closest they have been reported to the Castlemaine area.

* Barb Maund reports that she has again seen the Eastern Spinebills

twice feeding from her Red Hot Pokers (Knifophia).

* Margaret Willis has been enjoying watching Eastern Spinebills Pardalotes and Crimson Rosellas just outside the living-room window, where they rest in the bare branches of a deciduous tree.

* Ern Perkins noted that the Spreading Wattle has come into full flower at last with the rain. Cranberry Heath also came into flower about the same time.

* From Margaret Badminton - a Rose Robin has visited around the house in School Lane, Yapeen, three times in the 10 days since May 18 and the Tasmanian Silvereyes arrived on May 18. Also, two Southern Boobook Owls have been on the same branch of a neighbours' tree for 6 days (May 28) so far, and Brown-headed Honeyeaters have returned after three years absence.

* Question Corner - Brenda Envall has reported a Eucalypt in full flower on the side of the road at Ravenswood. She's curious to know what it is. It looks a bit like a Grey Box, but they finished flowering some time ago.

A Salutary Lesson

At the beginning of May I heard a young Magpie begging at home at North Castlemaine. Taking it for granted that it was the one that had been begging right up to the end of March I'd taken little notice, thinking that it had started again, but one morning a fortnight or so later I realised that it was a new one. The beak by that time was almost as long as the adults', but the black was still speckly grey, and the eyebrows still quite prominent. About ten days later I saw it being chased around and around by a raven which kept attacking it if it tried to land on a branch.. Finally the raven tired too, and sat on another branch panting with beak open. I unkindly clapped my hands, and, as I expected, it flew off. The young Maggie started wiping it's beak against the branch, and two bits of crust, which I'd put out earlier, began to emerge. I went inside, but when I came out about five minutes later, poor Maggie was squatting very wearily on a branch, but it had got rid of the cause of all it's problems.

Rita Mills

Tree Lucerne and Birds

A report in the Bird Observer for May '97 tells of eleven species of honeyeater feeding on one plant of Tree Lucerne in the city of Bayside in S.E. Melbourne. Their number included the Regent Honeyeater. The author, in his very interesting article, is now encouraging the Bayside Council to try Silver Banksia as a street tree as an alternative to Tree Lucerne, as it is a good local winter food tree for honeyeaters. The Club has the Bird Observer if you would like to read the whole article. The author, Michael Norris, has been carrying out a study of Tree Lucerne and it's environmental effects, particularly in relation to honeyeaters.

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church Hall. The entrance to car park is behind the Art Gallery, Lyttleton Street.

Fri June 13 Frogs, Graeme Watson, Melbourne University. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat June 14. Tang Tang Swamp and Tennyson. All day excursion. Leader R. Mills. Leave 27 Doveton St at 9.30am. Bring lunch, etc. and binocs.

Fri July 11 Nature Video Program 8pm. UCA hall.

Sat July 12 Walk at Daylesford in the Twin Bridges/Tipperary Springs area.

Leader E. Perkins. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10am. Take a packed lunch

Fri Aug 8 Pine Forest Management Speaker is Warwick Williams. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Sept 13 Exploring Mt Franklin area. Details to be finalised later.

Fri Oct 10 Plants of the Ballarat District, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Oct 12 Mt Beckwith. All day excursion. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy of Ballarat FNC. Meet at Clunes P.O. at 11am. Take lunch, etc.

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Committee: G. Broadway(Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M. Oliver (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), C. Morris, K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge, J. Turnbull.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St. at 8.00pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single \$16 Family \$24
Pensioner/Student: Single \$12 Family \$18. Supporting \$25
Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.

Late Observations

* Brenda Envall found what appears to be a juvenile Eastern Spinebill in her garden at Harcourt. While she was watching it a New Holland Honeyeater attacked and chased the Spinebill away and then came back and attacked her! It gave her quite a fright!

* She also reported that an Echidna came onto the verandah of the house where she works at Ravenswood. Someone was ripping rabbit warrens nearby and it was thought that it was possibly disturbed by the machinery and wandered over to the house for shelter.